



SECRETARIA GENERALIS
SYNODI

To the Participants at the Irish National Synodal Assembly

Vatican, 17 October 2026

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, my dear brother bishops,

It is a great joy to greet you as you gather for this important moment in the life of the Church in Ireland. I am sorry that, after initially indicating that I would travel to be with you in person I am now unable to do so.

I have followed the Irish Synodal Pathway with particular interest and closeness from its early stages. When I visited Knock in 2024, I experienced something of the earnestness and prayerfulness with which you have undertaken your synodal journey. And perhaps, being from Malta, I feel a particular affinity with Ireland: two island peoples, each with a rich Catholic heritage, and each learning how that inheritance can become once again a living missionary force in a rapidly changing society.

Your Working Document tells the story of five years of prayer, listening and discernment around a deceptively simple question: “What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time?” That is the question that must remain at the centre of all our deliberations. Synodality is about discovering what *God* wants of us, not what we ourselves might wish for. The title of your Working Document for today’s assembly places this question at the heart of the Irish process.

A few years ago, while the universal Synod was still underway, we spoke about the relationship between the Irish Synodal Pathway and the discernment taking place throughout the universal Church. At that time I suggested that, on questions still being discerned by the universal Synod, there could be wisdom in allowing that discernment to mature, and in waiting to receive its fruits. But this never meant putting synodality itself on hold, and I am glad to see that you did not do so. Indeed, I know you have made great progress in the intervening years in empowering and equipping the People of God for mission, especially through the many workshops and mini-assemblies you have conducted in all parts of your country.

Now, however, the situation has changed.

We received the Final Document of the Synod and we have now entered its implementation phase. The Final Document reminds us that the synodal journey does not end with an Assembly. Rather, synodality exists to ensure that the Church is constantly at the service

of mission, constantly “mission ready”. Mission and synodality belong together: “mission illuminates synodality and synodality spurs to mission” (FD, §32).

Mission readiness, as the Final Document underscored, depends upon the conversion both of people **and** of structures. Both are necessary, and it is important not to settle merely for one or the other. This missionary Church springs from Baptism (§15); mission belongs to all the baptised and calls for creativity and courage (§66). The Final Document calls for our participatory structures to become genuinely effective instruments of discernment and co-responsibility (§§103–104).

Concrete changes are therefore required in all our local Churches, and these are increasingly urgent if we are to remain faithful to the Church’s mission in rapidly changing contexts. This is especially so in countries facing intense secularism such as Ireland.

Following your meeting today you will be well placed to decide upon and implement practices and structures needed for mission, and to ensure that they embody a culture of shared discernment and decision-making, transparency and differentiated co-responsibility among the People of God in Ireland.

But deciding what is needed for the future also requires an honest review of what is already in place. Throughout this implementation phase, I have therefore been urging local Churches to review their existing structures, from parish pastoral councils to episcopal conferences and commissions, and to ask whether they remain fit for mission. Such a review requires a certain humility and self-effacement: a willingness to examine, as the Final Document requests, our established *modus vivendi et operandi*, our manner of living and operating, and to make whatever changes the demands of mission now require.

And so, I want to offer you some words of encouragement.

The first is to find the courage and confidence now to move from discernment to implementation.

Your own Working Document points in precisely this direction. After this Assembly it envisages your bishops setting aside time for receiving the fruits of your deliberations, evaluating them, then deciding and implementing, in what should become a continuing cycle of “listening, discernment, reception, conversion and mission.”

There is one area to which I would draw particular attention: marriage and family life.

You gather only days after our meeting here in Rome marking ten years since the promulgation of *Amoris Laetitia*. We have reflected again on how we proclaim the Gospel with families today, attentive to the beauty of sacramental marriage but also to the growing difficulties facing young people as they struggle to fulfil a vocation to marriage and family life. **We have recognised in Rome that the social and cultural circumstances in which young people are being invited to discover the joy of sacramental marriage, to have confidence in lifelong commitment, and to form and sustain families have become still more challenging in recent years, and I know this to be particularly the case in Ireland. That makes the task, your task, urgent.**

We have considered in particular how young people might be encouraged to take up this great challenge. It involves, I am convinced, acknowledging that human fragility does not exclude God's grace but can itself become a place in which that grace is encountered. **This is one of the deeper insights of *Amoris Laetitia*: situations which remain incomplete and imperfect are not necessarily situations from which grace is absent. Grace may already be at work within them, sustaining what is good, awakening desire and drawing people gradually towards greater fullness.**

Our pastoral task, therefore, is not simply to hold up the Christian ideal and measure people against it, but to discern the movement of grace already present in their lives, to accompany it patiently, and to help them take the next steps towards the fullness of the Christian vocation.

Ireland has particular experience to draw upon here. The World Meeting of Families in Dublin in 2018 was the first following the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*. I am especially encouraged that the programme you will be considering today gives such prominence to the family: to the domestic Church, accompaniment of married couples, family ministry, support for parents and grandparents in transmitting faith, and pastoral accompaniment where relationships experience difficulty and brokenness. These concerns run through the proposals on accompaniment in your Working Document.

Now seems an especially opportune moment, therefore, for the Church in Ireland to **revisit its reception and implementation of *Amoris Laetitia***, enriched by what we have heard in Rome and by what you yourselves have discerned. A review of the processes, structures and supports already in place for supporting sacramental marriage and the family could provide a fruitful **case study in mission readiness**, asking what should be strengthened, what should be changed, and what new forms of accompaniment are now needed.

But I would like to offer one further encouragement.

Ireland possesses an extraordinary missionary inheritance. For generations, Irish women and men carried the Gospel throughout the world. Today, as you already know, Ireland itself is missionary territory. This should not discourage you. On the contrary, it calls Ireland once again to become a missionary Church.

Your Working Document speaks with striking honesty about this. It recognises that declining practice and the painful legacy of abuse have drained some of the Church's outward-looking energy. It even acknowledges that the Synodal Pathway itself has sometimes struggled to escape an inward-looking tendency. Yet within the discernment it also detects a "quiet, humble, almost hesitant longing" for a Church that can once again confidently offer the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is a longing which I would encourage you to attend to humbly, without ever forgetting the wrongs and hurts of the past or the wounds they have left, but without allowing the Church's mission to be defined by them either. Rather, let what has been learned through them deepen your commitment to truth, healing and conversion, while responding with renewed courage and missionary zeal to what God is asking of the Church in Ireland today.

I know the change of perspective required is not easy. Declining numbers of, and ageing, clergy, as well as changing parish structures, can easily lead our pastoral imagination to become

dominated by what is being lost. Similarly, serious challenges confront your Catholic schools and institutions of higher education, which must find renewed ways of living and expressing their Catholic mission and identity in an increasingly secular culture. They too are called not simply to strive to preserve an inherited identity, but to become mission ready for the circumstances in which they now find themselves.

The danger in all of this is that management of decline becomes the operative pastoral paradigm. But I believe your own Working Document is asking a different question. Indeed, one of its proposals explicitly calls for a shift “from maintenance to mission.” That is the shift I would encourage you to make: Not simply managing decline, but re-purposing and re-positioning the Church, the portion of the People of God entrusted to you, for mission in a new era.

This will require courage. It will require formation, experimentation and evaluation. Sometimes it will mean letting go of familiar ways of doing things in order to release energy for new ones. Above all, it will require Ireland to recover something deeply embedded in its Catholic story: missionary confidence.

So I encourage you: Do not measure the future of the Church simply by what is disappearing. Discern what the Holy Spirit is bringing to birth. Do not simply manage a diminishing ecclesial landscape. Re-position the Church for mission within it.

And do this together, lay women and men, young and old, families and communities bishops, priests, religious, confident that the Holy Spirit who has accompanied your discernment will also accompany its implementation.

May God bless your Assembly, and may Mary, Our Lady of Knock, accompany the Church in Ireland as you continue to walk together.



Mario Card. GRECH
Secretary General

